The Beats and Independent Film: A Different Cast of Characters

Jane Falk

Soon after Allen Ginsberg returned to the United States in 1963, he wrote a piece for the *Times Literary Supplement* describing what was "happening now" in New York following his three-year absence: "Amazingly enough, MOVIES . . . I found on my return an excitement, a group, an art-gang, a society of friendly individuals who were running around the streets with home movie cameras taking each other's pictures just as—a decade ago—poets were running around . . . recording each other's vision in spontaneous language." He adds that "this is nothing like the commercial film of banks distributors money-stars etc. This is the film of cranks, eccentrics, sensitives, individuals one man one camera one movie . . . " (8). David James, in *Allegories of Cinema*, corroborates Ginsberg's impression: "Since the heyday of the beats, the baton of the preferred medium for subcultural mobilization has passed rapidly from writing to film and then to rock music" (348). James even categorizes some independent films of the 1960s as "Beat," with characteristics such as spontaneity, improvisation, sincerity, emphasis on the quotidian, and the inclusion of jazz and poetry. Such films also focused on countercultural types, such as Beat Generation characters whose transgressive behavior deviates from the norm.[1]

Just as Beat cultural values played a role in defining independent film production of the late 1950s and 1960s, so Beat writers themselves played a role in the filmmaking of this time period either as actors, writers, or producers of their own films. The first time the term "Beat" was applied to film may have been Parker Tyler's 1962 *Film Culture* review of the Robert Frank/Alfred Leslie film *Pull My Daisy,* with Jack Kerouac's film script and voice-over. Here Tyler describes "Beatism as a wee, wee cult," adding that it "is a collective form of authenticity" (109). The film, which won the second Independent Film Award of 1960, is a day in the life of a group of bohemians played by real life Beat writers Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, along with Peter Orlovsky, who hang out at the pad of a railway man, Milo, with his wife and child.[2] At the film and day's end, Milo's pals leave, taking Milo with them, his wife in tears. The Beat types offer a contrast with the more middle class values of Milo's wife and that day's guests: a bishop, his mother, and sister. This, however, was only one of a number of such collaborations, which exhibited certain characteristics in common. Beat poets and independent filmmakers shared the same social and artistic scene (Stan Brakhage met Michael McClure

through Robert Duncan); published in each other's magazines (McClure and ruth weiss in *Film Culture*); and experienced almost constant censorship during this time (for example, McClure and Lenore Kandel for their writing).

A number of critical studies have appeared on the subject of Beat writers and independent film. Among the most well-known are David Sterritt's books, *Mad to be Saved* and *Screening the Beats*, along with Daniel Kane's *We Saw the Light* and Jack Sargeant's *Naked Lens*. In looking at such texts, one might say that independent film has been dominated by the masculine, an emphasis that has not changed much over the years. In his 1967 study, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*, Sheldon Renan claims that the mid-century underground film "issued from a volatile environment . . . the climate of the new man." He goes on to explain this phenomenon of the "fifties" as a "willful withdrawal from cooperation with contemporary goals and modes of living. One example of this was the passive nonconformity of the Beats . . ." (42). Ironically, however, a number of Beat participants in the underground film culture of the time were women. In this regard, this essay presents both an expanded yet more focused view of independent film with a slightly different cast of characters, specifically women. As actors, women were given somewhat objectified roles, while as filmmakers themselves they provided roles in which women were empowered and at times dominant.

One aspect of this argument is the way male and female actors are treated differently by independent filmmakers. While male Beat writers were often presented as themselves, at times in the act of reading their poetry, their female counterparts usually appear in underground narratives where they are sexualized or take part in somewhat transgressive behaviors.[3] For example, Stan Brakhage creates film portraits of his poet friends Robert Creeley and Michael McClure in *Two: Creeley/McClure,* part of *15 Song Traits* (1965), a series that also included the Zukofsky and Dorn families. The visual effects of these short home movies are experimental, with ghostly superimpositions and jagged and dynamic camera movement. These act as devices of rhyme and rhythm with recurrent motifs such as a focus on the poets's hands as symbolic gestures. The aim, according to Brakhage, was to demonstrate the personalities and work of the subjects through film, even though the films are silent.[4] In both cases, Creeley and McClure are the centerpieces and the center of attention of the camera eye.[5]

In contrast, women poets are presented in more shocking and transgressive roles. For example, Diane di Prima plays the role of scantily clad Pregnant Cutie in Jack Smith's *Normal Love* (1963). Di Prima grew up in Brooklyn and associated both with the Beat Generation and the Lower East Side avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s. Smith and di Prima shared the same cultural milieu. Smith had published a prose poem, "Normal Love," in di Prima and LeRoi Jones's *The Floating Bear* and had shown his films at di Prima's Poets Theatre. In addition, they both had been

censored for their work: di Prima for her editing of *The Floating Bear* and Smith for his films. According to di Prima, the Poets Theatre "turned the week nights over to various other programs," among which was Jonas Mekas's Cinematheque (377). It was in February and March 1964, according to J. Hoberman's account, that Smith's production slides of *Normal Love* and Smith's film *Flaming Creatures* were the targets of police raids at the Poets Theatre's New Bowery Theater location (42).

Normal Love was ostensibly about monsters from horror films in a phantasmagoric natural setting, with one long section featuring a beautiful woman handling a python. The film presents a languorous, sensual, and perverse world replete with camp monsters, transvestites, and the semi-nude. Smith asked di Prima to take part in the film, and she appears in the finale, which features a gigantic cake upon which a tableau of scantily clad dancing girls protect one of the main characters, Pink Fairy. There are numerous close-ups of di Prima's pregnant belly. In her memoirs of these years, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*, di Prima describes her part as to "dance vigorously on the lowest tier of said cake, a print skirt tied under my huge belly . . . and tiny pasties on my nipples" (359). She adds that at the sight of the Green Mummy, "We screamed and fainted or did something of the sort. We all fell off the cake in any case, feigning various campy approximations of terror" (360). Unfortunately, the film was never completed and had primarily private screenings as rushes and rough cuts through 1965, according to Hoberman (96). Hence, it did not have the same opportunity to be banned as Smith's infamous *Flaming Creatures*.

Interestingly, di Prima also appeared with her then-husband Alan Marlowe in one of Andy Warhol's short portrait films of 1964, *Alan Marlowe/Diane di Prima,* discussed by Reva Wolf in her study of Warhol.[6] Wolf quotes di Prima, who had contacted Warhol suggesting that he "come see us & shoot a Day in Our House like you said & show Alan & me pornography." The action takes place in the couple's bedroom, as di Prima recalls: "Alan is in bed, and he's covered by a tiger skin, which he's stroking the tail of in a very obviously suggestive manner. I get on the bed in a black leotard and tights and kind of trample him. It was a tiny room" (qtd. in Wolf 44). This film's sexual overtone upends traditional roles with Marlowe as the seemingly passive, semi-nude figure and di Prima as the more active, clothed partner. Going against sexual mores of the time and creating "pornography" appears to be as much a part of di Prima's avant-garde anti-bourgeois shock tactics as those of Warhol.[7]

Lenore Kandel, associated with the Bay Area poetry scene, the hippie movement in San Francisco's Haight Ashbury, and the Beat movement, also appeared in independent film.[8] She plays the Deaconess, a mystic visionary associated with a Satanic cult, in Kenneth Anger's *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969). Her role, in comparison to di Prima's, is not so much sexually shocking as it is shocking to Christian sensibility. This short, eleven-minute film, cuts between footage from a Satanic Ritual of the Equinox presided over by Kenneth Anger as Magus in 1967

San Francisco Haight Ashbury combined with images of nude men, an albino, Anger's tattoos, Deacon, Deaconess, a burning cat, drugs, the Devil, and Marines landing in helicopters. Footage of the Rolling Stones in concert shot in London a year later was subsequently added, and the film was completed in 1969. Toward the beginning of the film, Kandel appears as Deaconess, with others smoking marijuana through a skull pipe; later bearing a goldfish bowl, she processes with the same group down a stairway.[9] Anger claims the film was his reaction to the war in Vietnam; in addition the superimposed and multiple camera images seem intended to invoke the mood of the drug experience of LSD or magic mushrooms.[10] The ritual itself recalls that of mystic and Satanist Aleister Crowley, who Anger admired. In an interview with Scott MacDonald, Anger describes the ceremony: "For *Invocation* I performed a Crowley ceremony,'The Equinox of the Gods,' to commemorate the autumn equinox, at the Straight Theater in the Haight-Ashbury, in 1967. I had someone [Ben Van Meter] film it for me, since I was involved in the ritual" (45).

There is no record of when Anger asked Kandel to be part of the film, but their paths had crossed at various alternative events in San Francisco, including the January 1967 "Human Be-In" and the February 1967 Glide Memorial Church "Invisible Circus." In the same MacDonald interview, Anger notes that he "met several of the characters…in the Haight-Ashbury" (45). While the Deaconess is not usually a role associated with this ritual, Anger may have added it to include Kandel because with her *Love Book* (published 1966, banned 1967), she had achieved some notoriety for explicit language and subject matter. Its cover shows a couple in tantric embrace, alluding to the kind of sexual magic Anger strove to invoke with his films. *Invocation of My Demon Brother* actually includes images of superimposed nude lovers, with the superimposition making the imagery less obvious to most viewers. Thus, her appearance could be considered part of the magical law of correspondences.[11] In addition, Kandel's then-boyfriend, a Hell's Angel named Sweet William, played the role of the Deacon, so Anger may have felt it appropriate to include her. After completion, the film was widely shown. As Bill Landis notes in his 1969 biography of Anger, it was "enthusiastically received on the underground film circuit in the United States." He adds that this film and others would "jump-start the phenomenon of cult movies" (175).

A more significant aspect of female participation in independent films is that of women as filmmakers, writing and directing their films themselves. The earliest of these was ruth weiss's *The Brink* (1961). A German émigré, weiss was a poet on the North Beach scene, intersecting with Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac. She was also an early proponent of reading poetry to jazz. *The Brink* was shot in and around San Francisco by painter Paul Beattie, who had asked weiss to write a script for a film, for which she used her poem, "The Brink" (1960).[12] She also chose locations for the film, edited it, and added a jazz sound score and voice-over of her poems.

The Brink is the story of two main characters, young lovers referred to as *he* and *she*, their relationship presented over several days and in various locations. The film credits show a caterpillar inching its way over a white surface, then action moves to Bay Area locations such as a city café, the beach, a cottage, Chinatown, a park with satyr statue, a forest, Playland at the Beach amusement park, and a housing development under construction. Toward the end of the film, the lovers are in a vacant lot where *he* puts a bracelet made of a dried snake skin on *she*. The couple then moves to a mailbox where they find a collage with a caterpillar crawling on it, a return to the film's beginning and the suggestion that the caterpillar may soon transform into a butterfly. Perhaps finding the collage indicates the part that art has to play in balancing opposing forces of male and female. The caterpillar is symbolic, as a poem of weiss's featured on the VHS/DVD cover makes clear: "it can crawl to the brink / but it cannot yet fly" (3-4). The poem ends with the concept of transformation:

> And the he and she fearing love as completion
> Call forth all interference
> This until the simple point of contact
> Where the butterfly is possible. (10-13)

Film Still from *The Brink*; Courtesy of the artist

This film might be considered an example of what P. Adams Sitney characterizes as mythopoeic film in his study *Visionary Cinema*, with images which "are not so much symbolic as archetypal, drawn primarily from the visual vocabulary of ancient mythology" (30).[13] Mythopoeia seems to relate to the "preoccupations" of Jung rather than to those of Freud (31). In an earlier essay published in *Film Culture*, "Imagism in Four Avant-Garde Films," Sitney considers that "mythopoeia is the often attempted and seldom achieved result of making a myth new or making a new myth" (199). In weiss's film, *he* and *she* appear as archetypal figures of lovers, a modern version of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, although weiss's lovers appear as equals rather than as the female being subordinate to the male. *She* leads him as often as *he* leads her. *She* appears dominant in a scene at the Bay's edge where *she* splashes him and then drags him into the water. The equality of the sexes is an important aspect of *The Brink,* as pointed out by Nancy M. Grace in *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers*: "[T]he film augments the vision of Beat culture, representing a heterogenous egalitarianism that counters the misogyny of the 1959 Robert Frank/Alfred Leslie film *Pull My Daisy*" (58).[14]

Elements of the surreal are another aspect of this film, specifically in the eccentric and sometimes illogical juxtapositions of the action, including scenes with dreamlike qualities hinting at the subconscious mind of the characters.[15] The film's editing at times presents viewers with abrupt and seemingly irrational scene changes. For example, action shifts from the lovers and a group of friends eating a meal at the beach house to a scene where *she* walks the streets of Chinatown described by the voice over as a "won ton woman, wanton woman." In another sequence, *he* is suddenly alone in his flat and lies down to sleep. The scene shifts to daytime with the lovers in a park where they encounter a headless satyr statue, after which they are shown lying in the grass appearing to wake up. What has been dreamt? Who has been dreaming?

Another aspect of the film that seems important to weiss is the emphasis on the natural world, which a refrain from "The Brink" reinforces:

> to clean water use earth
> to clean earth use fire
> to clean fire use air
> to clean air
> enter.[16] (245-249)

These lines are voiced over scenes of water, sky, and bird life. The natural world also recalls haiku poetry, a genre important to weiss.[17] Stan Brakhage made note of the film's affinity with haiku in letters from California published in *Film Culture,* Summer 1963, stating that the film attempts "to pitch the actors into situations preordained by ruth weiss's poetry yet leave them free of the context unaware

of the poetic narrative intended, to develop synthesis of poetry and image highly structured but containing a residue of very real immediate, almost haiku feeling" (80). Shortly after its completion, weiss showed her film to Brakhage at his home, and it was subsequently screened at Canyon Cinema and the 1961 San Francisco International Film Festival.[18]

In contrast, Helen Adam's *Daydream of Darkness* (1963) is less a "mainstream" version of an independent film (if such is not an oxymoronic term) than her own idiosyncratic vision and embodiment of her poems, "Anaid Si Taerg (Great is Diana)" and "Daydream of Darkness." In both poems, the moon plays a starring role. A Scots émigré, Adam was a balladeer and performance poet who was part of the San Francisco Renaissance in the 1950s and 1960s, closely connected with Robert Duncan's circle. Adam asked painter Bill McNeill to collaborate on this film with her. According to Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian in their study of Jack Spicer, Adam wrote the script and chose the images while McNeill produced and directed, and both worked on the editing of the film. *Daydream of Darkness* was originally presented as silent with Adam performing the voice-over to musical accompaniment.

Film Still from *Daydream of Darkness,* copyright the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York and used with permission

The heroine of the film is the Moon Goddess, Diana, present as a metal relief sculpture: a large round disk with a woman's head framed by a crescent moon. It is placed in various natural settings, most often at the beach.[19] Women are also privy to the "world's mysteries," as the voice-over contends. Other male and female god and goddess figures appear as art nouveau statues brandished almost as if they were hand puppets, but only rarely are the hands of the "puppeteers" visible. The statues along with images of Adam's collages alternate with more dynamic scenes of two couples, one bearing candles in a domestic setting, the other emerging from and merging with the ocean. Adam appears as a seer holding up tarot cards of Lovers, the Devil, and the Moon. The high point emotionally may be the lovers kissing in a salt marsh. The film's final image is of a stone face falling off of a book on Voodoo, preceded by the lovers walking in the sea swept apart by waves. The juxtaposition of the lovers with the Voodoo head presents an inexplicable and surreal ending reinforced by the lyric script with the following lines accompanying these actions: "LOVE AND LONELINESS NEVER EXISTED NO! NO! LET ME CLING TO A TEAR OR A RAIN DROP TERRIBLE ARE THE TRUTHS OF ZEN" (264).[20] The juxtaposition of moon worship, Voodoo, and Zen is an additional surreal touch.[21]

This film is another example of the mythopoeic with emphasis on the mythic and archetypal. The words of the songs, poems, and script invoke Diana, Huntress and Goddess of the Moon, while presenting love between men and women as often doomed, a fate exemplified in these lines: "BUT SHE COULDNA HA' BECKONED MY LOVE TAE THE FIRE…HAD HE NEVER BEEN FALSE TAE ME" (262). The last sections of the script make allusions to Buddhist concepts of the Void and emptiness: "THE VOID ALONE IS REAL…EVERYTHING IS NOTHING… LOVE…AND LONELINESS…NEVER EXISTED" (263-64).[22] Perhaps Adam is suggesting that the futility of love and desire represented in the ballad tradition is similar to the Buddhist concepts of the Four Noble Truths, the second of which is that desire is the cause of suffering.[23] In a technological age when men are preparing to land on the moon, the moon herself seems doomed. The following lines of the film script, however, suggest that the Moon remains powerful and can overcome opposites: "AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE MOONLIGHT. AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE MOONLIGHT…AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE OPPOSITES OVER ALL THE EARTH" (260). Despite this somewhat negative ending, the film's lasting impression is one of female dominance and identification with the natural world.[24] It is unclear how often the film was shown after its premiere in 1963 at The Peacock Gallery, San Francisco. Adam did not make another film, but concentrated on reprising her musical, *San Francisco's Burning*, after leaving San Francisco and moving to New York.

A third female independent filmmaker is Joanne Kyger. Moving to North Beach in the 1950s from Santa Barbara, she became associated with both the San

Francisco Renaissance and the Beat Generation. An experimental video, not a film, Kyger's *Descartes* (1967), was made in conjunction with the National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET), San Francisco.[25] Kyger wrote her poem, "Descartes and the Splendor Of," as a "screenplay" for the video. She was asked to participate in this project on her return to the Bay Area from a stay in New York from 1966-67, and considers *Descartes* her most successful and finished work for the project. Interestingly, she had been a stand-in for a Jack Smith film, *Mr. President,* and had met Andy Warhol and seen his film *Chelsea Girls*, so experimental film was part of her background at this time. A seeming parody or deconstruction of Enlightenment philosopher René Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, the video is for Kyger an "adaptation."[26]

Kyger's poem and video rewrite and revise Descartes's *Discourse* from a female point of view; in the process He becomes She, and God becomes Mother God. It is a poem and film in six parts, the first of which shows Kyger beginning a journey with a close-up of her face and a newsreel-like review of contemporary life. The second and third parts present the narrator/Descartes in a domestic setting sweeping and mending, as she literalizes his admonition to sweep out old ideas from the mind. In the fourth part, her head takes up the full screen again as she intones Descartes's famous words: "I THINK hence I AM. OR I doubt hence I Am; or I reject hence I am. You get the picture." The fifth part presents Mother God as a hieratic goddess figure distorted by camera effects of multiple image and superimposition. A fanfare sounds. The last part returns to a contemporary scene in the TV studio, the camera focused in on the narrator/Descartes and her final revelations. The video ends with the narrator's curtsey to Mother God, as she speaks the poem's last line: "ONE CANNOT SO WELL LEARN A THING WHEN IT HAS BEEN LEARNED FROM ANOTHER, AS WHEN ONE HAS DISCOVERED IT HIMSELF."[27] However, the video's final move is the narrator's correction of that last line; she follows the poem's (and Descartes's) word, *himself*, with the added word, *herself.*

For Kyger, video seemed an apt medium with which to deconstruct Descartes's ideas about mind/body duality. As she put it, Descartes's "body mind problem could be resolved in videospace."[28] Video was an open field in which the aural and the visual could meet and merge; experimenting in another medium other than language could express the idea of ridding oneself of mind/body duality. The video also positions Kyger in the mythopoeic tradition. Descartes's God is replaced by a vision of Mother God as goddess figure, enhanced by visual and aural feedback. Kyger moves her arms up and down, her appearance similar to that of Diana the Many-Breasted, as her voice echoes and reverberates.[29] Enhanced by electronic distortion and feedback, these vocal and tonal shifts are among the most remarkable of the video's aspects. Her voice ranges from that of a humorous cartoon character

to an authoritarian, professorial mode, and then to the other-worldly voice of Mother God, ending with what might be Kyger's own voice. She notes that the sound track and voice changes were created collaboratively with composer Richard Felciano: "Each of the six parts of *Descartes* had a different video set and a different sound and vocal approach."[30] The completed video was subsequently shown on San Francisco broadcast television in November 1968.[31]

Film Still from *Descartes*; Courtesy of the artist

In making these films and videos, women poets created not just lyrical film poems or a type of experimental film, but films which enhance their poetry. Film provides what Kyger considers an expanded field in which to work. The imagery of the films augments that of the poems and was a way for these filmmakers to represent Pound's early twentieth-century imagism. For example, images of the goddess in various configurations and in various physical spaces in Adam's *Daydream of Darkness* provide various ideas of what the goddess means to men and women. Imagism in the context of film is a term used by Sitney in his essay, "Imagism in Four Avant-Garde Films." His influence in using this term was Ezra Pound's imagist manifesto, and Sitney cites a passage from this text as the epigraph to his essay: "The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster" (187).[32] In "A Few Don'ts,"

the text in which Pound originally presented the term, he explains, "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (4).[33] By imagism, Sitney means that the camera concentrates "on a single human and one significant action" (190). Imagism can also include themes related to that image, especially when the image bears mythopoeic overtones. One central image can motivate an entire film, as demonstrated by Adam's moon goddess in *Daydream of Darkness* or weiss's lovers who wander through various scenes in *The Brink*. As the action proceeds, more of the complex relationship of the lovers is revealed. Even though none of these examples corresponds to a single human's one significant action, a connection to Sitney's theories is evident, especially considering his comment in *Visionary Cinema* that "lateral or foreign material is introduced around the essential action without completely disrupting its unity or continuity" (26).

Another way film work expanded these poets' existing interests was by reinforcing the oral and performative aspects of their work: weiss as jazz poet and Adam as balladeer. Kyger would be further influenced by her video to emphasize tone of voice in poetry as she notes in a 1977 interview.[34] In regard to improvisation, another aspect of the performative, of the three poem scripts, weiss's treatment is the most improvisatory and least like a straightforward reading, as she breaks up "The Brink" to fit the action of the film. Kyger's vocal distortions impart an improvisatory quality to the reading of her poem. In comparison, it is unclear how Adam's voice-over changed or whether she improvised. She may have sung her lines, but there is no recording of her performance. Note that di Prima and Kandel do not speak in their films, and, in fact, independent films of the time were often silent with musical accompaniment. Perhaps the poets' voice-overs were an unconscious response to the silent voices of other experimental filmmakers and to women in experimental film in general.

The women involved in these projects worked primarily before the feminist wave of the 1970s when problems of women's stereotypes were being actively addressed. As actors in films by men, they chose to be associated with transgressive and non-conformist film statements, which were not necessarily feminist but at least demonstrated that women were able to choose such roles. Di Prima shows her pregnant belly without shame, a statement of fecund sexuality. In *Alan Marlowe/ Diane di Prima*, she is the active sexual partner. As filmmakers, women dominate the action and all women act in their films, as well as perform voice-overs, from weiss's bit part to Kyger's starring role.[35] Instead of appropriated female bodies, they present archetypal images that are more often dominant over the male (Kyger's Mother God) or at least equal (weiss's *he* and *she*), with emphasis on the close connection between the female and forces of nature (Adam's Moon Goddess, Diana). The interest in the mythic often features feminist symbols or female goddesses, as when God is replaced by Mother God in *Descartes*.

Emphasis on the feminine aspects of the mythopoeic suggests that these films were feminist statements before their time. However, problems with the stereotyping of women are evident in the use of the mythopoeic, as noted by Dianne Sadoff in her essay "Mythopoeia, The Moon, and Contemporary Women's Poetry": "The landscape of our mythology reflects masculine activity and female passivity …Woman becomes passive nature, man its active and heroic inhabitant" (96). Focusing on moon mythology, she writes, "Whether wife, Great Mother, sacred prostitute, or virgin, then, sexuality is central to the moon goddess's identity and to worship of her" (97). For Sadoff, the feminist solution to stereotyping is transformation: "When a woman writer encounters these mythologies, she must reinvent, revise, and transform them to fit…her unique female experience. Contemporary women poets correct dualistic moon myths by reexamining both aspects of the moon goddess, the virgin and the prostitute" (98).

Whether weiss, Adam, or Kyger achieved this transformation remains to be decided by twenty-first-century viewers. Adam, for example, could have played into lunar stereotypes as much as she transformed them. The moon is the female and the sun is the male in these lines from the lyric script of *Daydream of Darkness*: "THE LORDLY SUN IN THE HEAVENS MOVE" (259). In her poem "Anaid si taerg (Great is Diana)," which serves as partial basis for the film, the male is active—"Man's alive, he's got what it takes" (24)—while the moon seems doomed: "Horns, horns, blow for the moon's mort" (34).

Of all the films discussed, *Descartes* can be considered the closest to a feminist film statement, as David James's reference to Julia Lesage's discussion of feminist consciousness-raising film projects suggests: "Within such a narrative structure, either a single woman tells her story…or a group of women are filmed sharing experiences in a politicized way. They are filmed in domestic space in a 'new woman-identified way'" (323). Although Kyger does not claim objectivity in her "adaptation" of Descartes and does not use a documentary structure; her film presents a domestic space in a "new woman-identified way." As well, the film presents Mother God, a powerful, feminist figure. At the very least, a discussion of these films reminds us that though under-represented in critical discussion of independent Beat films of the mid-twentieth century, women were active participants in the scene. They used their own voices and their own film scripts, or rewrote male-authored texts.

We now conclude with a consideration of the liberatory possibilities of independent film itself. For Walter Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," film has power to direct attention to details of daily life sometimes missed or overlooked: "By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring common place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends

our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action" (236). In the space between the words and images in these women-authored films and in their focus on relationships, can what Judith Butler calls the destabilizing of "naturalized categories of identity" (139) occur? Can female stereotypes be transformed? Writing as a contemporary of these filmmakers, Herbert Marcuse in his 1964 study *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* suggests they can: "The aesthetic dimension still retains a freedom of expression which enables the writer and artist to call men and things by their name—to name the otherwise unnameable" (247). As actors or filmmakers, women are no longer only passive recipients of the male gaze, but active participants in the making of their own films, presenting relationships between the sexes from a woman's point of view.

Notes

[1] See James Chapter 4, first section, "Film and the Beat Generation." Note that in this essay, I use the term "independent film" for this phenomenon, although other terms such as *New American Cinema* (recalling New American Poetry), visionary film, underground film, experimental film, avant-garde film, or alternative film are also in circulation. See James and Sheldon Renan for more on these terms.

[2] This award was established by Jonas Mekas in his magazine *Film Culture*, the most significant publication of the independent film scene at the time.

[3] Some exceptions are narratives in which male Beats appear, such as Lew Welch in *The Great Blondino*, Michael McClure in *Beyond the Law*, or Allen Ginsberg in *Me and My Brother*. The actors are not sexualized, although Ginsberg and his lover, Peter Orlovsky, appear in *Me and My Brother*, as well as in Gregory Markopoulos's film, *Galaxie*. McClure's character's sexuality is emphasized at times.

[4] Guy Davenport describes the McClure film as "a raging flash of faces, some of which are the lion's face McClure assumes for the readings; Robert Creeley, also in black and white, and frequently in negative, an evocation of the poet's tense sincerity" (11).

[5] Another film portrait of a poet is *Liberty Crown*, Bruce Connor's video of McClure reading his poetry, which is apparently now lost. Even in Frank's film *Me and My Brother*, Ginsberg reads his poetry.

[6] Although *Marlow/Diane di Prima* was listed as a screen test in Warhol's film catalogue, Warhol Museum curator Greg Pierce considers that short portrait film best describes this work.

[7] For example, Warhol's 1964 film, *Couch*, includes sex acts as well as nudity; interestingly, one of its vignettes features Beat writers Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Orlovsky cavorting but clothed on said Factory couch, a possible allusion to *Pull My Daisy*.

[8] Kandel also had a relationship with poet Lew Welch and appears as Ramona Schwartz in Kerouac's novel *Big Sur*.

[9] William Wees in *Light Moving in Time* suggests that she may be patterned after Crowley's *Scarlet Woman,* a priestess with sexual associations (120).

[10] This commentary can be found on the DVD version of Anger's *The Complete Magick Lantern Cycle*.

[11] *A Dictionary of Symbols* describes this law as "founded upon the assumption that all cosmic phenomena are limited and serial and that they appear as scales or series on separate planes . . . the components of one series are linked with those of another in their essence and in their ultimate significance" (60).

[12] According to a telephone interview with weiss, this poem was used along with lines from other poems, including "Chop Sticks" and those in *Blue in Green.*

[13] Ray Carney, in his essay "Escape Velocity: Notes on Beat Film," also characterizes weiss as an "allegorical or symbolic" artist (207).

[14] According to weiss, she was unfamiliar with this film at the time she made *The Brink*.

[15] Note Grace's discussion of surrealism in conjunction with weiss in "ruth weiss's DESERT JOURNAL: a Modern-Beat-Pomo Performance" in *Reconstructing the Beats*. Ed. Jennie Skerl. New York, NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004.

[16] Quotations from "The Brink" are taken from weiss's *Single Out*.

[17] weiss notes in an interview in *Breaking the Rule of Cool* that she wrote haiku in North Beach with Jack Kerouac in the 1950s (64).

[18] In *The Brink*, weiss makes a cameo appearance as a fellow transit passenger on the bus with the couple.

[19] According to M. Esther Harding in *Woman's Mysteries,* "Diana, the Huntress, was none other than the Moon Goddess, Mother of all animals. She is shown in her statues crowed with the crescent . . ." (130). A Roman goddess, she is identified with the Greek Artemis. ruth weiss has a poem to Diana and her temple in her first collection, *Blue in Green.*

[20] Page numbers refer to the published lyric script in *A Helen Adam Reader*.

[21] Adam probably ended the film with these lines. In reproducing the film for the DVD of the *Helen Adam Reader*, Kristin Prevallet added a voice-over of Adam's original script and music to the originally silent film. However, not all the script as it appears in the *Reader* has been included in the DVD version; these last lines are among those left out.

[22] Note that Prevallet has left these lines out of the new version of the film, as well as lines mentioning Zen.

[23] The Four Noble Truths include the truth of suffering; the cause of that suffering in desire; there is a way to deal with that cause; and the truth of the cessation of suffering is the Eightfold Path. According to Prevallet in an email dated January 31, 2015, to the author of this essay, there is no explicit connection between Adam and Buddhism, except that it was part of the cultural conversation of the time.

[24] Prevallet in her essay "The Worm Queen Emerges" claims that ballads are liberatory for women (29).

[25] Gene Youngblood, in his study *Expanded Cinema*, considers experimental video to be an outgrowth of experimental film, and James likens non-commercial video to an "aesthetic project parallel to that of structural film" (350).

[26] This quote and the one above indicate Kyger's characterization of her work, according to her email of May 21, 2015.

[27] This is the line as published in *Places To Go*, the basis for the video, which Kyger added during filming. Capitalized words in the poem indicate quotes or close quotes from Descartes. The passage from Descartes reads in part in the original as follows: "that there may not be in the world many minds incomparably superior to my own, but because no one can so well understand a thing and make it his own when learnt from another as when it is discovered for himself" (124).

[28] This quote is from an email to the author of January 20, 2006.

[29] For an image of this goddess, see Harding's *Woman's Mysteries* (108).

[30] Quote from an email from Kyger dated May 26, 2015. Note that Felciano was composer for the NCET video project.

[31] Kyger's video was also featured in UC Berkeley's *Videospace* exhibition of 2001 and included in the Getty Museum *California Video* exhibition of 2008.

[32] Sitney credits Stan Brakhage's interest in Pound's imagism as his influence in developing this idea.

[33] "A Few Don'ts" was originally published in *Poetry* in 1913.

[34] See Kyger's interview for *Credences* in which she considers the poem as a "score for the voice" (64).

[35] Their acting and voice-overs are similar to those of William S. Burroughs in his films, especially *Towers Open Fire*.

Works Cited

Adam, Helen. *A Helen Adam Reader*. Ed. Kristin Prevallet. Orono, Maine: The National Poetry Foundation, 2007. Print.

Alan Marlowe/Diane di Prima. Dir. Andy Warhol. 1964. Orig. 16 mm. DVD.

Anger, Kenneth. "Kenneth Anger." Interview by Scott MacDonald. *A Critical Cinema 5.* Ed. Scott MacDonald. Berkeley: U of California P, 2006. 16-54. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations.* Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 217-51. Print.

Brakhage, Stan. "Letters: San Francisco Film Scene." *Film Culture*. 29 (Summer 1963): 76-102. Print.

The Brink. Dir. ruth weiss. Camera: Paul Beattie. 1961. Orig. 16 mm. DVD.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Carney, Ray. "Escape Velocity: Notes on Beat Film." *Beat Culture and the New America*: 1950-1965. Ed. Lisa Phillips. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995. 190-209. Print.

Cirlot, J. E. "Correspondences." *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Trans. Jack Sage. New York: Philosophical Library, 1962. Print.

Creeley/McClure: Two Songs. Dir.: Stan Brakhage. 1965. Orig. 16 mm. DVD.

Davenport, Guy. "Two Essays on Brakhage and His Songs: Guy Davenport." *Film Culture.* 40 (Spring 1966): 9-12. Print.

Daydream of Darkness. Dir.: Helen Adam. Camera: William McNeill. 1963. Orig. 16mm. DVD.

Descartes. Dir.: Joanne Kyger. Camera: Loren Sears. Videotape. 1968.

Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*. Trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G.R.T. Ross. Vol. I. New York: Dover Publications, 1955. Print.

Di Prima, Diane. *Recollections of My Life as a Woman.* New York: Viking, 2001. Print.

Ellingham, Lewis, and Kevin Killian. *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan UP, 1998. Print.

Ginsberg, Allen. "Back to the Wall." *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995*. Ed. Bill Morgan. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. 6-9. Print.

Harding, M. Esther. *Woman's Mysteries.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1955. Print.

Hill, Jerome, and Guy Davenport. "Two Essays on Brakhage and His Songs." *Film Culture*. 40 (Summer 1966): 8-12. Print.

Hoberman, J. *On Jack Smith's* Flaming Creatures *and Other Secret-Flix of Cinemaroc*. New York: Hips Road, 2001. Print.

Invocation of My Demon Brother. Dir. Kenneth Anger. 1969. Orig. 16mm. DVD.

James, David. *Allegories of Cinema.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970. Print.

Kyger, Joanne. Email to author. 15 January 2015.

—. Email to author. 22 May 2015.

—. Email to author. 26 May 2015.

—. *Places To Go*. Los Angeles: Black Sparrow, 1970. Print.

—. "Three Versions of the Poetic Line." *Credences*. 2.1 (March 1977): 55-66. Print.

Landis, Bill. *Anger: The Unauthorized Biography of Kenneth Anger*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. Print.

Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society.* Boston: Beacon, 1964. Print.

Normal Love. Dir.: Jack Smith. 1963-64. 16 mm.

Pierce, Greg. Telephone interview with the author. 20 December 2015.

Pound, Ezra. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound.* Ed. T.S. Eliot. New York: New Directions, 1968. 3-14. Print.

Prevallet, Kristin. Email to author. 31 January 2015.

—. "The Worm Queen Emerges." *Girls Who Wore Black*. Ed. Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U P, 2002. 25-44. Print.

Renan, Sheldon. *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1967. Print.

Sadoff, Dianne. "Mythopoeia, The Moon, and Contemporary Women's Poetry." *The Massachusetts Review.* XIX.1 (1978): 93-110. Print.

Sitney, P. Adams. "Imagism in Four Avant-Garde Films." *Film Culture Reader.* Ed. P. Adams Sitney. New York: Praeger, 1970. 187-200. Print.

—. *Visionary Cinema*. New York: Oxford UP, 1974. Print.

Tyler, Parker. "For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*." *Film Culture Reader*. Ed. P. Adams Sitney. New York: Praeger, 1970. 108-117. Print.

Wees, William C. *Light Moving in Time.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1992. Print.

weiss, ruth. *Blue in Green*. San Francisco: Adler Press, 1960. Print.

—. *Single Out.* Mill Valley, CA: D'Aurora, 1978. Print.

—. "Single Out." Interview by Nancy M. Grace. *Breaking the Rule of Cool*. Ed. Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2004. 55-80. Print.

—. Telephone interview with the author. 13 February 2015.

—. Telephone interview with the author. 11 May 2015.

Wolf, Reva. *Andy Warhol: Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997. Print.

Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970. Print.